

Thank you Mister chair,

Ladies and gentlemen, as you probably all know, the situation in Iraq has recently entered into a very critical stage for the existence of minorities. We have been witnessing hundreds of thousands of people from minority communities fleeing from their territories. Approx. 7,000 Yazidies (girls, women, children and men) have been kidnapped and are still in the hands of ISIS/ISIL and being trafficked between regions. More than 3000 of men, children and women have been killed. Thousands of Christians fled from their areas. Most of minorities in Iraq have become displaced lost hope and lost the sense of belonging to their areas.

Having worked on the ground and observed the situation closely, I would like to shed some light on some of the early trends/root causes/ulterior motives that led to the catastrophic situation of minorities in Iraq.....

Minorities are miss-understood and there is a wrong picture about their beliefs, ideology and the way they practice their life. This wrong picture and the resulting hatred toward certain minorities combined with speech directed against them has reached a critical level and has been transferred into a tangible violence. For example, one speech by a religious leader attended by a group of youth, in few hours, led to the burning of a whole hotel that belongs to a Yazidi. Some community leaders/religious leaders have said in public and on media that Yazidies are infidels and it's halal (allowed) to kill them. These leaders are iconic in the society and they have thousands of followers. The idea of Yazidies are being infidels has become a wide spread and a common idea among a large number of people throughout Iraq. This was one of the reasons that even made ISIS act differently against Yazidie; they killed Yazidies and trafficked their families because they thought they were infidels and it was halal. The hatred against Yazidi minority was the reason why many local people (neighbors, those who lived in the area for decades) attacked Yazidies, killed men, kidnapped their women/girls and children, as soon as the ISIS took over the area. Even after the dreadful events happened to Yazidies, there have been religious leaders talking on a famous local TV station commenting that Yazidi children, women and men who have died from dehydration and starvation on the mountain of Sinjar are "going to the hell, and there is no doubt about it", implying that they do not deserve

to go to heaven. This religious man is a very well known religious leader and gives a speech every week in mosque that is being attended by a large number of youths who interact with Yazidies during their daily life.

Minorities know that at some point- ISIS will leave their areas but the problem is that these crimes and the last events go beyond the issue of ISIS. The problem has its roots in the way local people are seeing them, these are the reasons that made some of the local people act like ISIS did against them. At some point there have been some attempts made by minorities to address this hatred against them, but because of having no mechanisms to address this hatred and the violations of their rights, what started as discrimination, turned into incidents of violence and then gradually turned into bigger crimes, and it has reached a point when it has become a 'sleeping power against minorities' that can be turned into action whenever there is an opportunity, like the one presented by ISIS.

On the other hand, the education curriculum does not include teaching of the history, culture and traditions of the minorities. The ignorance and lack of knowledge about minorities is widespread in the country. Many people don't know Yazidies, the content of their/our religion, their/our culture. At the same time there are community leaders spreading the culture of hatred against certain minorities.... The ignorance *plus* the hatred based on incorrect picture about minorities, both work together in making local people to turn against them, and discriminate, and violate the rights of minorities.

Indeed, if we look at the earlier stages of the situation that led to the current situation of minorities, we will find that people belonging to minority communities were being discriminated against on a daily basis in schools, universities, and many aspects of public life. Minorities were not able to counter the discrimination that they were subjected to every day. It has created an environment where minorities 'accepted' that they were being discriminated. The discrimination (I would call it the early stage of the crimes and atrocities witnessed in Iraq today) wasn't solved at the early stages because there was no mechanism to counter it, crimes

targeting minorities were not addressed and this gradually turned into atrocity crimes against them.

In addition to all of these, the lack of participation of minorities in public life was another aspect that facilitated / made it possible to have violence and atrocities targeting minorities. If there was adequate participation of Yazidies in the security forces existing in their areas, the level of the atrocities probably would have been much lower and many families would have been saved. There wasn't any sympathy, by the forces, toward minorities, therefore many families were abandoned and left in the hands of ISIS. If there the security forces and military had tried to counter ISIS, it would have given families a few more hours to escape, and thousands of the kidnapped Yazidies would have had time to reach the mountain to survive from the ISIS.

Ladies and gentlemen, the society in Iraq still has the trends of a clan based and religious based society. When it comes to religious hate crimes, there is always impunity. When a thirteen years old Yazidi girl was kidnapped, there was no proper investigation into the case since the government treated the case with much caution as it did not wanted to be seen being weak in front of a certain religious group. More than a year after the incident, no one knew where the investigations led to, and no results were shown for the case. These have made it more likely for these kinds of crimes to happen again.

Let's not forget that the civil society is playing a very strong role in Iraq in challenging the violations of rights of minorities but mechanisms to address these violations are non-existent. The nonexistence of anti-discrimination law and lack of mechanisms to counter hatred makes challenging discrimination very difficult. We believe that if there were such mechanisms, it would have made the minority activists much stronger in addressing these violations and advocating for their rights. It would have created a very cooperative environment between government and civil society in dealing with these crimes. An anti-discrimination law and its

effective implementation would address discrimination at the early stage and would prevent it from turning into violence against minorities.

Thank you,

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